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SUBJECT: TIBET: DCM URGES CHINESE FLEXIBILITY

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[1](#)C. BEIJING 4063
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2884

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission
Dan Piccuta. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The United States is concerned by the lack of progress in talks between the Dalai Lama's representatives and Chinese authorities and urges China to take a more flexible approach to achieve concrete results, DCM told United Front Work Department (UFWD) Vice Minister Si Ta on November 12. Si Ta, a senior PRC representative to the talks with the exiled Tibetans, asserted that the door remains "wide open" to additional discussions from Beijing's perspective, but the Dalai Lama's envoys were unwilling to agree to a date for a next round, given the upcoming meeting of Tibetan exiles scheduled for later this month. Si Ta disagreed with the widely reported characterization that "no progress" had been made at the most recent round of talks, arguing that the discussions allowed both sides to "frankly" state their views and led to better "mutual understanding." Si Ta insisted the talks are solely about the "personal future status" of the Dalai Lama, with Tibet's political status not being open for discussion. The proposals on "genuine autonomy" put forth by the Dalai Lama's representatives are merely "independence in disguise" and remain "unacceptable" to China, Si Ta declared, asserting there is "no space" to discuss the issue. The DCM stressed the need for China to deal wisely and flexibly with the issue of Tibet and to allow more visits to Tibetan areas by foreign diplomats and journalists. End Summary.

CHINA SHOULD BE FLEXIBLE

[1](#)2. (C) The United States is concerned by the lack of progress in talks between the Dalai Lama's representatives and Chinese authorities and urges China to take a more flexible approach to achieve concrete and measurable results, Deputy Chief of Mission Dan Piccuta told United Front Work Department (UFWD) Vice Minister Si Ta on November 12. (Note: The meeting with Si Ta was at the DCM's request and was made prior to the start of the most recent round of talks that concluded on November 5.) Drawing on ref A points, and referring to the November 10 press conference by the UFWD, the DCM emphasized that the harsh rhetoric used recently by the Chinese Government to describe the Dalai Lama is not helpful to finding a solution to the Tibet issue. Instead, such rhetoric and the absence of progress in the talks have

reinforced the impression among many in the international community, as well as an increasingly frustrated population of Tibetans in China, that the discussions lack prospects for success. The Dalai Lama is a man of peace and an internationally recognized religious leader. The United States urges China not to lose this opportunity to reach an accommodation with the Dalai Lama through negotiations. The DCM reminded Si Ta that absent a sincere dialogue that produces visible progress, China will continue to face pressure from its Tibetan population, the Tibetan diaspora and the international community to address human rights and religious freedom abuses and to take seriously the need to preserve the unique culture and heritage of the Tibetan people.

"FAMILY MATTER"

13. (C) Si Ta replied by reiterating standard talking points that Tibet is an internal affair and the PRC opposes foreign interference of any kind in Tibet. The talks between the UFWD and representatives of the Dalai Lama are a "family matter for China." The Dalai Lama side has for years engaged in propaganda to "distort" history and the current situation in Tibet. As a result, many people abroad do not understand the "true conditions" in Tibetan areas of China, Si Ta asserted.

TIMING OF NEXT ROUND DEPENDS ON TIBETAN SIDE

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14. (C) In response to the DCM's question whether there has been agreement on a subsequent round of talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives, Si Ta said from China's point of view, the door remains "wide open" (chang kai) to additional talks. At the latest sessions, according to Si Ta, the Dalai Lama's envoys were unwilling to agree to a tentative date for the next round. Si Ta opined that the Tibetan side would wait until after their large-scale meeting of exile representatives later this month (ref D) before deciding whether to pursue further discussion. The last such conference, held in 1992, resulted in a decision by the exiles to cut off dialogue. The Tibetans broke off contact, Si Ta claimed, because the Dalai Lama's side expected the political changes then sweeping the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would spread to China. Later, in 2002, the Tibetan side requested the resumption of dialogue, after political developments in China did not proceed "as Tibetans had hoped," Si Ta asserted.

UNDERSTANDING IS A FORM OF PROGRESS

15. (C) Si Ta said he disagreed with the widely reported notion that "no progress" was made at the latest round of talks. (Note: Si Ta's comments stand in contrast to UFWD Executive Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun's statements to the media on November 10, when Zhu was quoted by the official news agency Xinhua as saying this last round of talks "failed to make progress.") While there remains a vast difference between the positions of the two sides, Si Ta said, the talks allowed both sides to "frankly" state their views, which led to better "mutual understanding." Moreover, Si Ta asserted, by taking the Dalai Lama's envoys to the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, where they met with a number of experts, professors and officials, as well as through a meeting with UFWD Minister Du Qinglin, the Tibetan side gained a

"better, more clear understanding" of how autonomy functions within the Chinese legal system.

TALKS WITH DALAI LAMA, NOT "TIBETAN GOVERNMENT"

16. (C) Reiterating points UFWD Executive Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun made at the November 10 press conference, Si Ta argued that the dialogue is solely about the future of the Dalai Lama's personal status. China's stance on this point has remained unchanged since the time paramount ruler Deng Xiaoping was in power, Si Ta emphasized. The talks are strictly with the Dalai Lama's personal representatives, not with the Tibetan "government in exile," which is an "illegal" organization "unrecognized by any foreign government." Neither the Dalai Lama nor the "exile government" represents Tibetans as a whole, and there is no basis for China to discuss with the Dalai Lama's envoys the political status of Tibet. The sole "legal" representatives of the Tibetan people in China are the People's Congress representatives in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Chinese provinces, Si Ta stated. While the Dalai Lama's side now says that it can accept that Tibet is a part of China, "they continue to argue that Tibet was independent in the past," Si Ta said, adding that this attitude does not allow for progress.

MEMO ON AUTONOMY "UNACCEPTABLE"

17. (C) Although China has made clear from the beginning that the political status of Tibet is not open for discussion, Si Ta continued, in previous sessions the Dalai Lama's representatives constantly raised "vague" terms like a "high level of autonomy" in terms of politics, language and culture. In response, China repeatedly asked what precisely was meant by these terms. Thus, at this latest round, the Dalai Lama side provided the UFWD with a memo on its views of "genuine autonomy." Upon reading the memo, Si Ta said, it became clear that their demands are to implement "independence in disguise" (bianxiang duli) in an area comprising "one-fourth of China's territory." "We cannot accept this," Si Ta said, arguing that there is "no space" to discuss that issue.

PRESS CONFERENCE TO COUNTER "INSINCERITY" CHARGE

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18. (C) In response to the DCM's question why Executive Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun chose to make his comments on the talks to the press on November 10, Si Ta said the Dalai Lama and others on the Tibetan side have been speaking frequently to the media, accusing China of being "insincere" and saying they were "giving up" on the talks. In response, the State Council Information Office and the UFWD decided to hold the November 10 press conference to "explain the real situation" and "let the international community judge why there has been no progress."

CHINA SHOULD EXPAND ACCESS TO TIBET

19. (C) Picking up on Si Ta's reference to the "real situation," the DCM suggested that the entire international community takes great interest in how Beijing treats ethnic Tibetan residents of China, as well as in the progress of the talks with the representatives of the Dalai Lama, who is recognized worldwide as the spiritual leader of the Tibetan

people. Dealing wisely and flexibly with the issue of Tibet would contribute to the long-term stability of Tibetan regions. The DCM encouraged the Chinese Government to allow more visits to Tibetan areas by foreign diplomats and journalists so that these observers can judge for themselves the situation in those areas.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The tone of Vice Minister Si Ta's comments appeared designed to put a more positive spin on the talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives, as compared to the harsh rhetoric used by UFWD Executive Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun with the press on November 10, when Zhu declared the talks "failed to make progress" and blamed the Dalai Lama for this outcome. Si Ta, by contrast, chose to emphasize that the talks allowed for a "frank" exchange of views and increased "mutual understanding." Si Ta nevertheless stuck to China's traditionally tough line, repeatedly stating that, from Beijing's perspective, the only "legitimate" topic for conversation in these talks is the Dalai Lama's "personal status."

RANDT